

State of the City Address

January 28, 2002

GOOD EVENING.

THANK YOU FOR JOINING ME TONIGHT FOR MY FOURTH STATE OF THE CITY ADDRESS.

2001 TURNED OUT TO BE A YEAR OF CHALLENGES FOR NOT ONLY AUGUSTA – BUT AMERICA.

WE WERE PUT ON A WARTIME FOOTING BY A VICIOUS ATTACK ON OUR SOIL.

THE PEOPLE OF AUGUSTA, JOINED BY OUR NEIGHBORS IN COLUMBIA, MCDUFFIE, WARREN, BURKE, AIKEN AND EDGEFIELD COUNTIES - AND OUR JAPANESE SISTER CITY - RESPONDED WITH "CARE AND PRAYER."

BUT EVEN TONIGHT, WE REMAIN IN A STATE OF INCREASED VIGILANCE AGAINST THOSE WHO WOULD DESTROY OUR WAY OF LIFE.

MANY OF OUR CITIZENS HAVE JOINED THE WAR AGAINST TERRORISM, BOTH AT HOME AND ABROAD, AND THE PRAYERS OF A GRATEFUL CITY FOLLOW THEM.

MUCH WORK REMAINS IN AUGUSTA, AND WE MUST NOT LOSE SIGHT OF THAT IN 2002.

IT HAS BEEN AN HONOR FOR ME TO BE YOUR MAYOR THESE PAST THREE YEARS.

DAVID SEABURY SAID – "No man will work for your interests unless they are his."

I CONTINUE TO EMBRACE THOSE INITIATIVES THAT WILL MAKE AUGUSTA THE PREMIER CITY IN GEORGIA.

THIS YEAR, WORK WILL BEGIN ON THREE NEW FIRE STATIONS, A NEW ANIMAL CONTROL BUILDING, A NEW SURFACE WATER TREATMENT PLANT IN SOUTH AUGUSTA, AND A NEW GYM IN SAVANNAH PLACE PARK.

THIS YEAR EXPECT MARKETING PLANS TO BE DRAWN FOR A MUCH NEEDED STATE OF THE ART PERFORMING ARTS CENTER AND A NEW CIVIC ARENA;

THIS YEAR, EXPECT A NEW MASTER PLAN FOR AUGUSTA REGIONAL AIRPORT; AND THIS YEAR, A COMPLETE UPDATE OF THE CITY'S LAND USE PLAN.

THIS YEAR, EXPECT AUGUSTA TO BE DESIGNATED TO HOST A STATE CANCER CENTER OF EXCELLENCE, AND BENEFIT FROM ALL THE TREATMENT BREAKTHROUGHS AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT THAT WILL FOLLOW.

THIS YEAR WE'LL ALSO BE HOSTING EVENTS OF STATE, REGIONAL AND NATIONAL IMPORTANCE, INCLUDING PROFESSIONAL MEN'S AND WOMEN'S GOLF, THE GEORGIA GAMES, THE BOSHEARS SKYFEST WITH THE BLUE ANGELS, AND MANY OTHERS.

THIS YEAR ARTS IN THE HEART OF AUGUSTA HAVE A NEW HOME.

IT WILL BE OUR INAUGURAL EVENT IN THE BEAUTIFUL NEW AUGUSTA COMMON – THE DOWNTOWN VISTA WHICH LINKS BROAD STREET WITH THE SAVANNAH RIVER .

THAT WORK IS NEARING COMPLETION.

ALL OF THIS AND MORE MAKES ME PROUD OF OUR COMMUNITY AND MAKES AUGUSTA COMPETITIVE WITH THE GREAT CITIES IN AMERICA.

IN THESE THINGS, WE ARE SHOWING MOMENTUM.

BUT LIKE ANY OTHER CITY, WE HAVE CHALLENGES TO FACE, AND I WANT TO ADDRESS THOSE TONIGHT.

OUR BIGGEST CHALLENGE COMES IN THE POLITICAL ARENA WITH THE CURRENT STRUCTURE OF OUR GOVERNMENT.

WHEN I RAN FOR OFFICE FOUR YEARS AGO, I TOLD YOU I COULD BE AN EFFECTIVE MAYOR WITHOUT A VOTE AND A VETO.

SOME DOUBTED THAT, BUT, INDEED, I HAVE HAD NEITHER.

YET, OVER THE PAST THREE YEARS, THE COMMISSION HAS PASSED EVERY INITIATIVE I HAVE PROPOSED.

CASE IN POINT- THE COMMISSION APPROVED MY RECOMMENDATION FOR OUR CITY ADMINISTRATOR ON A UNANIMOUS VOTE.

THE LACK OF A VOTE AND VETO HAS NOT HELD ME BACK IN WORKING FOR YOU IN AREAS OF COMMUNITY PROMOTION AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT.

THAT'S NOT THE PROBLEM.

THE ROOT OF THE PROBLEMS WITHIN THE CITY GOVERNMENT, IN MY VIEW, IS THE LACK OF A CHECK AND BALANCE, BECAUSE THE COMMISSION IS BOTH LEGISLATOR AND ADMINISTRATOR.

HAVE YOU HEARD IT, READ IT, EXPERIENCED IT?

PEOPLE TELL ME ALL THE TIME THAT THEY ARE GETTING WEARY OF THE CONSTANT BICKERING AND RACE-BAITING IN COMMISSION MEETINGS.

YOU DESERVE BETTER - AND UNLESS SOMETHING CHANGES WE ARE IN FOR MORE OF THE SAME.

THE OLD SAGE ONCE SAID "IF YOU ALWAYS DO WHAT YOU'VE ALWAYS DONE, YOU'LL ALWAYS GET WHAT YOU'VE ALWAYS GOT."

RIGHT NOW, AUGUSTA IS LOSING GROUND...AND BUSINESS... AND EVEN SOME GOOD MINDS, WHO HAVE GIVEN UP HOPE.

BUT...HERE'S THE GOOD NEWS ...LEGISLATION HAS BEEN INTRODUCED IN THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY TO PUT IN THE CHECKS AND BALANCES THAT YOU KNOW WE NEED.

I HEARTILY ENDORSE THOSE MEASURES AND ANY OTHERS THAT WILL ENSURE THE PEOPLE OF AUGUSTA HAVE A GOVERNMENT OF WHICH THEY CAN BE PROUD.

IF YOU AGREE WITH ME, OR EVEN DISAGREE, THEN I URGE YOU TO CONTACT YOUR MEMBER OF THE LEGISLATIVE DELEGATION.

YOUR VOICE MUST BE LOUD AND CLEAR.

BUT, BE WARNED – A SENIOR MEMBER OF YOUR DELEGATION LIKES THE POLITICAL CHAOS JUST THE WAY IT IS.

WHY?

BECAUSE POWER THRIVES ON FEAR AND MISTRUST.

HE IS QUOTED IN THE NEWSPAPER SAYING IF YOU "DON'T LIKE IT, YOU SHOULD MOVE."

NOW, THAT IS SAD.

YOU SHOULDN'T HAVE TO MOVE TO GET EFFECTIVE GOVERNMENT.

INSTEAD, THOSE WHO THINK THAT WAY, SHOULD THEMSELVES BE MOVED !

THE LAW THAT CREATED OUR CONSOLIDATED GOVERNMENT GAVE THE CITY COMMISSION SOLE AUTHORITY OVER BOTH LEGISLATIVE AND ADMINISTRATIVE BRANCHES.

THAT'S A PROBLEM.

WE ENTER 2002 QUESTIONING THE COMMISSION'S ABILITY TO MANAGE THIS GOVERNMENT.

WE ARE MISSING PEOPLE IN KEY LEADERSHIP POSITIONS - DIRECTOR OF FINANCE, TRAFFIC ENGINEER, FIRE CHIEF, EVEN A COUNTY ENGINEER.

IS IT ANY WONDER WHY I GET CALLS FROM BUSINESS PEOPLE COMPLAINING THAT IT TAKES 45 TO 60 DAYS TO GET THEIR BUILDING PLANS APPROVED?

THE LIST GOES ON.

WE HAVE A GREAT TEAM OF HONEST AND DEDICATED CITY EMPLOYEES WHO ARE CRYING OUT FOR THE LEADERSHIP THESE VACANCIES DENY.

YOU ARE ALSO PROBABLY AWARE THAT THE COMMISSION HAS CHOSEN TO DIP INTO RESERVES AND RAISE PROPERTY TAXES TO BALANCE THE BUDGET THIS YEAR.

THAT SHOULDN'T COME AS A SURPRISE...

THE CONSOLIDATED GOVERNMENT HAS BEEN ON A STEADY COURSE OF RAISING EVERY TAX AND FEE

IN SIGHT SINCE IT CAME INTO BEING IN 1996.

THAT'S SIX STRAIGHT YEARS OF INCREASES.

WHAT DO YOU HAVE AFTER PAYING 6 STRAIGHT YEARS OF INCREASES.

WE CERTAINLY KNOW WHAT WE DON'T HAVE.

ABOUT THE ONLY THING LEFT TO INCREASE IS THE PROPERTY TAX.

HOW DID WE GET TO THIS POINT?

THE COMMISSION IS A LOT LIKE THE HIGH SCHOOL COUNSELOR WHO WANTED EVERYONE TO LIKE HIM, SO HE BEGAN TRYING TO PLEASE EVERYONE.

WHEN HE WAS ASKED TO INTERVENE IN A DIFFERENCE OF OPINION BETWEEN TWO STUDENTS, HE ASKED THEM WHAT HAPPENED.

ONE STUDENT TOLD HER SIDE, AND THE COUNSELOR RESPONDED, " YOU HAVE A POINT THERE – YOU ARE RIGHT."

THE OTHER STUDENT CHIMED IN WITH HER VERSION. THE COUNSELOR NODDED HIS HEAD AND SAID: "I CAN SEE WHY YOU FEEL THAT WAY – YOU ARE RIGHT."

A BYSTANDER WITNESSED THE AFFAIR AND CONFRONTED THE COUNSELOR AND SAID INDIGNANTLY: "SIR, THEY CAN'T BOTH BE RIGHT."

THE COUNSELOR THOUGHT A MOMENT AND ANSWERED: "YOU'RE RIGHT, TOO."

YOUR CITY GOVERNMENT CANNOT BE ALL THINGS TO ALL PEOPLE, ESPECIALLY IN TOUGH ECONOMIC TIMES.

MAKE NO MISTAKE ABOUT IT.

THIS COUNTRY IS IN A RECESSION AND HAS BEEN FOR ALMOST A YEAR.

HOW HAVE THE FEDERAL AND STATE GOVERNMENTS HANDLED THIS PROBLEM?

THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT IS CUTTING YOUR TAXES, AND TALKING ABOUT CUTTING THEM EVEN MORE.

THE STATE GOVERNMENT IS GIVING YOU ANOTHER PROPERTY TAX BREAK BY INCREASING YOUR HOMESTEAD EXEMPTION.

BOTH ARE BOLD MOVES BUT THE FED AND STATE REALIZE THAT PUTTING MONEY INTO YOUR POCKET IS THE BEST WAY TO FIGHT A RECESSION.

THE RESPONSE FROM THE AUGUSTA COMMISSION IS RADICALLY DIFFERENT. IT IS TO

RAISE TAXES, TAKING MONEY OUT OF YOUR POCKET.

WE'RE NOT THE ONLY CITY IN GEORGIA WITH BUDGET PROBLEMS.

ATLANTA IS ANOTHER EXAMPLE

THE DEFICIT THERE IS MUCH LARGER THAN AUGUSTA'S, BUT THE POLITICAL LEADERSHIP UNDERSTANDS IT CAN'T BE ALL THINGS TO ALL PEOPLE.

SAYS FORMER MAYOR MAYNARD JACKSON – "THE CITY WILL HAVE TO CONCENTRATE ON PROVIDING BASIC SERVICES, SUCH AS POLICE AND FIRE PROTECTION AND GARBAGE PICKUP.

BUT OTHER USEFUL AND NEEDED SERVICES MIGHT HAVE TO GO BY THE WAYSIDE FOR A LITTLE WHILE."

THE NEW MAYOR, SHIRLEY FRANKLIN, ORDERED SPENDING CUTS OF 20% TO BALANCE THE BUDGET.

SPENDING CUTS! REDUCTIONS! RESPONSIBLE DECISIONS!

A PROPERTY TAX INCREASE WAS NOT EVEN ON THE TABLE.

LAST YEAR, GEORGIA LOST MORE JOBS THAN ANY OTHER STATE IN THE UNION.

GOVERNOR BARNES UNDERSTANDS WHAT GOVERNMENT MUST DO IN SLOW ECONOMIC TIMES.

HE'S CUTTING SPENDING...

SAYS THE GOVERNOR – " I LOOK AT DOWNTURNS AS OPPORTUNITIES TO LEAN UP, TO BE ABLE TO RE-EXAMINE HOW WE CAN MORE EFFECTIVELY AND EFFICIENTLY DELIVER SERVICES, TO QUESTION EXPENDITURES AND TO SAY THAT, JUST LIKE BUSINESS DOES IN DOWNTURNS, WE NEED TO MAKE SURE OUR PRIORITIES ARE CORRECT."

THE ECONOMIC ADVICE FROM JACKSON, FRANKLIN AND BARNES COMES FROM PEOPLE WHO UNDERSTAND THE PROBLEM THEY FACE.

EVEN IN A SLOW ECONOMY, YOU SHOULD EXPECT AUGUSTA'S GOVERNMENT TO DO WELL, WHAT WITH ALL THE PROMISES OF ECONOMIES AND EFFICIENCIES THAT CAME

WITH CONSOLIDATION.

BUT THAT IS NOT THE CASE AT ALL.

INSTEAD, WE ARE BEGGED AGAIN TO ASK: WHERE ARE THE SAVINGS THAT WERE PROMISED THROUGH CONSOLIDATION?

OVER THE PAST SIX YEARS, CONSOLIDATION HASN'T CURBED SPENDING OR REDUCED THE SIZE OF GOVERNMENT.

YOUR CITY GOVERNMENT HAS MORE EMPLOYEES NOW THAN THE TWO FORMER GOVERNMENTS HAD COMBINED, AND IT'S SPENDING IS UP TO OVER A MILLION DOLLARS A DAY.

THE LEGISLATIVE ACT THAT CREATED YOUR GOVERNMENT CAN BEST BE DESCRIBED AS THE "FULL EMPLOYMENT ACT OF 1995."

ONE HAS TO WONDER IF THE PRIORITIES ARE CORRECT IN AUGUSTA.

THE QUESTION NOW IS WHETHER AUGUSTA'S FRAGILE ECONOMY CAN SHOULDER THE BURDEN OF THIS GOVERNMENT.

CONSIDER THE CONDITION OF OUR LOCAL ECONOMY.....

UNEMPLOYMENT REMAINS HIGH COMPARED TO GEORGIA'S OTHER METRO AREAS.

PER CAPITA INCOME IS LOWER.

THE ECONOMIC FORECASTERS PREDICT A FOURTH STRAIGHT YEAR OF NEGATIVE JOB GROWTH.

THE PERCENTAGE OF PEOPLE IN AUGUSTA IN POVERTY IS INCREASING.

OUR POPULATION SHOWS EXTREMELY SLOW GROWTH COMPARED TO THE SUBURBS.

WHILE AUGUSTA IS IN AN ECONOMIC RECESSION, IT IS ALSO IN A POLITICAL DEPRESSION.

NOW IS NOT THE TIME TO RAISE ANYONE'S TAXES.

THE COMMISSION WILL FORMALLY SET THE TAX RATE THIS SUMMER, WHEN THE

DIGEST IS COMPLETE.

YOU HAVE ROUGHLY SIX MONTHS TO SEND YOUR MESSAGE TO THE COMMISSION

YOU SHOULD DEMAND FISCAL RESPONSIBILITY.

YOU SHOULD EXPECT A RESPONSIBLE BUDGET THAT REORGANIZES GOVERNMENT FOR EFFICIENCY AND ECONOMY.

WHAT DO YOU DO AT HOME WHEN YOUR INCOME DOESN'T COVER EXPENSES?

YOU DON'T JUST CONJURE UP MORE MONEY.

YOU REDUCE EXPENSES. AND GOVERNMENT SHOULD BE NO DIFFERENT.

THIS MAY MEAN A REDUCTION IN SERVICES OR ELIMINATION OF POPULAR PROGRAMS.

BUT, TIMES ARE TIGHT, AND PEOPLE UNDERSTAND WHAT IT MEANS TO SACRIFICE.

WE MUST BE AWARE OF WHAT MESSAGE A TAX INCREASE SENDS TO OUR CITIZENS.

HOW DO A TAX INCREASE AND MORE GOVERNMENT HELP.....

.... THE 800 PEOPLE WHO ARE LOSING THEIR JOBS AT SAVANNAH RIVER SITE THIS YEAR?

.....THOSE PEOPLE WHO NEVER FOUND WORK AFTER KING MILL CLOSED?

.....THE 145 PEOPLE NOW AT MACY'S WHO FACE THE CLOSING OF THEIR STORE?

....AND THE HUNDREDS OF OTHERS WHO LOST THEIR JOBS IN 2001 AND ARE STRUGGLING JUST TO MAKE THEIR HOUSE PAYMENTS THIS YEAR.

DOES A TAX INCREASE IN AUGUSTA DO ANYTHING FOR THESE PEOPLE?

DOES THE TAX INCREASE HELP OUR SENIOR CITIZENS ON FIXED INCOMES?

AND WHAT DOES A TAX INCREASE DO FOR THE BUSINESS COMMUNITY?

HIGHER TAXES WILL CAUSE THEM TO CUT BACK, OR SIMPLY PASS THE TAX ALONG TO YOU – THE CUSTOMER – SO YOU CAN PAY TWICE – ONCE WHEN YOU SHOP AND AGAIN

WHEN YOU GET HOME.

AND, FURTHER, WILL THIS ENCOURAGE MORE BUSINESS IN AUGUSTA?

I THINK A TAX INCREASE WILL DRIVE BUSINESS OUT OF RICHMOND COUNTY, THEREBY DECREASING TAX INCOME AND, AS YOU CAN SEE, START A DEATH SPIRAL, BECAUSE THE FEWER BUSINESSES WE HAVE TO SHOULDER THIS OVERLOADED GOVERNMENT, THE MORE HOMEOWNERS WILL HAVE TO PAY!

THERE ARE OTHER ANSWERS. AMONG THEM:

OUTSOURCING SUPPORT FUNCTIONS TO THE PRIVATE SECTOR. WE'VE ALREADY SEEN HOW REAL SAVINGS CAN BE ACHIEVED BY THIS.

EARLY RETIREMENTS MAY BRING AN ESTIMATED TWO MILLION DOLLARS IN ADDITIONAL SAVINGS.

EMPLOYEE INCENTIVE PROGRAMS CAN SHOW US EVEN MORE WAYS TO SAVE.

AND THIS IS JUST THE START.

YOU MUST JOIN ME IN INSISTING THE COMMISSION LOOK HARD AT REDUCTIONS, INSTEAD OF ALLOWING THE COMMISSIONERS TO SIMPLY TAKE THE EASY WAY OUT.

OR, WE CAN STAND BY TOGETHER AND ALLOW THEM TO RAISE TAXES AGAIN...FOR THE SIXTH STRAIGHT YEAR.

IN HIS CLASSIC WORK, THE BOOK OF FAILURES, STEPHEN PILE SHARES AN UNFORGETTABLE STORY.

IN 1978, DURING THE FIREFIGHTERS STRIKE IN ENGLAND, THE BRITISH ARMY HAS TAKEN OVER EMERGENCY FIREFIGHTING.

THIS MADE POSSIBLE ONE OF THE GREATEST ANIMAL RESCUE ATTEMPTS OF ALL TIME.

ON JANUARY 14TH, THE ARMY WAS CALLED TO ASSIST AN ELDERLY WOMAN IN SOUTH LONDON RETRIEVE HER CAT.

RESPONDING IMMEDIATELY TO THE CALL, THEY CLEVERLY AND CAREFULLY RESCUED THE CAT AND CELEBRATED THEIR VICTORY.

AS THEY STARTED TO DRIVE AWAY, THE LADY INSISTED THAT THIS BATTALION OF HEROES STAY FOR TEA.

DRIVING AWAY LATER WITH ARM FAREWELLS AND FESTIVE SPIRITS, THEY RAN OVER THE CAT AND KILLED IT.

CONSOLIDATING THE GOVERNMENTS HERE MAY HAVE SAVED THE CAT, BUT THE COMMISSION'S STEWARDSHIP OF YOUR TAX MONEY THIS YEAR MAY VERY WELL KILL IT.

WE TALK ABOUT ECONOMIC INCENTIVES TO ATTRACT NEW BUSINESS.

THERE'S NO BETTER INCENTIVE THAN A LOW TAX RATE....ASK ANY BUSINESSPERSON. AND AUGUSTA-RICHMOND COUNTY HAS ONE OF THE LOWEST PROPERTY TAX RATES IN THE STATE.

IN A SURVEY I COMMISSIONED LAST FALL, TWO OUT OF EVERY THREE OF YOU TOLD ME THAT THERE WERE TWO THINGS MOST IMPORTANT TO YOU.ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND JOB CREATION.

THESE ARE THE BIGGEST ISSUES IN AUGUSTA.

THIS IS WHERE THE FOCUS NEEDS TO BE, OR WE'LL SLUMP BACK INTO NOTHING MORE THAN A SECOND RATE CITY WITH A FIRST RATE GOLF TOURNAMENT.

MAKE THESE YOUR ISSUES, AND TELL THOSE ELECTED OFFICIALS THAT YOU WANT ACTION.

THE CLOCK IS TICKING.

IT'S TIME YOUR ELECTED OFFICIALS PUT ASIDE THEIR "WHAT'S IN IT FOR ME" POLITICS AND MADE THE ECONOMIC HEALTH OF THIS CITY, AND EVERY CITIZEN HERE, THEIR FIRST PRIORITY.

TIME IS RUNNING OUT FOR OUR CITIZENS – AND ESPECIALLY OUR BUSINESS COMMUNITY – TO BE HEARD.

2002 IS THE YEAR OF CHALLENGE, AS NO OTHER YEAR HAS BEEN IN THE SHORT HISTORY OF OUR CONSOLIDATED GOVERNMENT.

YOUR MAYOR'S MESSAGE TONIGHT IS ONE OF LEADERSHIP.

IT IS A CALL TO ACTION...A CALL FOR YOU TO GET INVOLVED.

HOW CAN YOU DO THAT?

CALL AND WRITE YOUR CITY COMMISSIONER, TELL OTHERS HOW YOU FEEL, AND SHARE THOSE THOUGHTS THROUGH LETTERS TO THE EDITOR.

DON'T BE TIMID...TELL THEM YOU'VE HAD ENOUGH.

OUR ADVERSARY IS STRONG. IT HAS BEEN HERE A LONG TIME.

IT IS DEEPLY ENTRENCHED ON THE DARK SIDE OF POLITICAL LIFE IN AUGUSTA.

THE ADVERSARY IS APATHY.

DOING NOTHING HAS GOTTEN US WHERE WE ARE TODAY.

FOR THE PAST THREE YEARS, I'VE FOUGHT AGAINST TAX AND FEE INCREASES.

I'M TAKING THAT STAND AGAIN (TONIGHT) AND CHALLENGING YOU TO JOIN ME.

THE BATTLE OVER THIS NEW BUDGET IS A STRUGGLE BETWEEN PROTECTING THE STATUS QUO AND DEFINING THE FUTURE OF THIS COMMUNITY.

YOUR VOICE COUNTS NOW MORE THAN EVER BEFORE.

FINALLY, KEEP OUR CITY IN YOUR PRAYERS.

ASK FOR THE WISDOM OF EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP

MAY GOD BLESS YOU.

AND, MAY GOD BLESS AUGUSTA.